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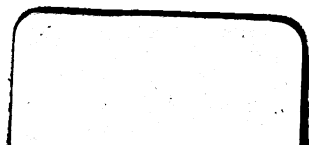
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ILLUSTRATIONS
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SCRIPTURAL CHARACTERS:
FROM THE FOUR GOSPELS.

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ILLUSTRATIONS
OF
SCRIPTURAL CHARACTERS:
FROM THE FOUR GOSPELS.

BY THE REV. R. POLWHELE,
Vicar of Manaccan, Cornwall.

“ As they reasoned — Jesus drew near — and their eyes were
“ opened.”

L O N D O N;

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PREFACE.

THE main arguments for the Belief of Christianity are, doubtless, drawn from the prophecies and miracles of Our Saviour. And, of these evidences of the Christian Religion, we have been presented with several views, short and comprehensive, and adapted for popular use. The last, and confessedly the best, of the Publications to which I allude; is, "The Summary" of the Bishop of London; a beautiful little essay; where perspicuity and elegance of style and language are not less conspicuous, than sound argument and Christian piety. This "Summary" I should not venture to bring to my Reader's recollection; much less should I presume to say, that the following Sketches are meant to be a sort of Appendix to the Bishop's Treatise, had I any other motive in publishing them, than the edification of the persons for whose use they are intended.

Though the principal evidences of Christianity have been produced in every shape; yet many of the subordinate proofs have not been sufficiently considered. Of these, a great variety are suggested

to the reflecting mind, by incidents in the Gospels, which have the appearance of being merely fortuitous. It is remarkable, that scarcely a personage occurs in the Evangelic Story, but seems to throw light, as if by accident, on our Saviour's Divinity.

To point attention to such situations and attitudes of character, as may thus illustrate the person of our Divine Teacher, is my wish and my design in the subsequent pages. And to fix that attention to a single situation or attitude for ten minutes, sometimes five, sometimes less, is equally my wish and my design. The mind will be thus engaged without being fatigued; and at liberty to drop the subject or pursue it, independently of the writer. A solitary hint may lead to the development of truth: and an argument, though not original, yet apparently new from its position, may suggest a train of reasoning and reflexion highly interesting and useful.

INTRO-

INTRODUCTION.

WHILST we recollect, that we are required to be always ready to give an answer to every man who "asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us," we ought also to remember, that this answer is to be given "with meekness and with fear*." The propriety of observing the former part of the injunction is sufficiently evident: but, if we lose sight of the latter, we may be tempted, in our efforts to satisfy enquiry, to exchange reasoning for casuistry, or plain argument for sophistical refinement.

We may thus "reason," if we please: but "Jesus himself" will not "draw near;" nor will our "eyes be opened†."

The present is an age of scepticism. In this country, are some open Infidels: but there are sceptics without number.

With sceptics it is much the fashion, to look into the Bible as they look into history in general, for the sake of acquiring a knowledge of its principal incidents and characters; and, last of all, its doc-

* 1 Peter iii. 15. † Luke xxi. 13. 31.

trines. And their object, in this perusal, is, merely to qualify themselves for scriptural discussions—in colloquial discourse, and for intermixing sacred subjects with those levities and impurities which too commonly attend the circulation of the glass. This has become, more and more, the mode, since the publication of Paine's "Age of Reason;" and, it now seems, that he who is not "always ready to give an answer" to the question of his companions, on Scriptural points, is regarded as extremely ignorant, and even ill-bred *. Among subjects of this sort, I have observed, I think, a peculiar promptness in introducing CHARACTERS.

The view of historical personages is, undoubtedly, pleasing: but it is the familiar aspect of Scriptural characters that, here, recommends them to attention. From the simplicity, with which these Sacred Persons are delineated, they seem level to our view: they are brought home to common apprehension. Doctrines, in the mean time, are abstruse, and often mysterious: it is more easy, therefore, to examine a character, than to discuss a doctrine. Hence, it happens, that characters are made the subjects of conversation, without the slightest regard to decorum or propriety. It is with the utmost facility, that Our Saviour's actions are commented on; and that the Fishermen of Gallilee, are brought under review.—And the twelve Apos-

* This is so much the age of authors; there are so many writers among people of fashion, that an ignorance of literature seems no longer compatible with good breeding.

ties (if not twelve scoundrels, in the language of Voltaire), are treated with so much profaneness, as, on reflexion, must shock even the conversers themselves, and wound the sensibility of all but philosophers.

But, amidst these gaieties of the heart, the conversation has, generally, a tendency to seriousness. And it passes, by insensible gradations, from the ridiculous to the argumentative. Religion, in truth, is of such a nature, as to impress almost every bosom, with a sense of its momentousness. And, however the man of this world may affect to regard it historically or philosophically, his Biblical researches, superficial as they may be, will always create to him uneasiness in proportion to his doubts — will leave on his mind a weight which he will endeavour to throw off, by the communication of his sentiments to his convivial friends.

Though, therefore, Scriptural characters may, first, be sported with capriciously or wantonly; yet they will, afterwards, be frequently considered with a view to the *evidences* of Religion. And, in the social circle, they will often suggest arguments unfavourable to the cause; falling, as they must, into the hands of persons who, at one moment, wish to scatter doubt in dissipation; at another, to relieve their minds, by communicating and sharing it with others.

To persons of this description, I would introduce a few portraits from the Gospel-history: and if, by placing these portraits in peculiar attitudes, I

shall illustrate, to their satisfaction, the evidences of Christianity; perhaps, I may succeed in converting their disposition to examine, and their readiness to cite from Scripture, to a most important use. Whilst they shall be taught to search the Scripture, not from a momentary impulse, but from an impression of its more than historical dignity, they will shudder at their ignorance in looking through the Bible as the work of "man's wisdom;" and, whilst they shall "be ready to answer" those who ask a "reason of their hope," "with meekness" "and with Godly fear," they will lament their indifference, in reasoning as persons, that "have no hope!"

Thus, whilst they reason, may "Jesus himself" "draw near; and their eyes be opened" to his Divinity!

ILLUS.

ILLUSTRATIONS SCRIPTURAL CHARACTERS:

FROM THE FOUR GOSPELS.

AUGUSTUS CÆSAR.

THOUGH the exact *time* of Our Saviour's birth be not settled among ecclesiastical writers; yet, from the concurrence of records, sacred and profane, it was a period of universal peace; when the decree from Augustus Cæsar for enrolling "all the world" was put into execution; and when Herod the Great reigned in Judea.

"It came to pass (says St. Luke) in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria*." Previously to this enrolment, Augustus had shut the temple of Janus—

* St. Luke ii. 1, 2.

an event, which is thus stated by Suetonius: "Janum Quirinum semel atque iterum a condita urbe memoriam ante suam clausum, in multo brevior tempore spatio, terra marique pace parta, ter clusit *." The tranquillity in which Augustus thus composed the world continued twelve years.

The general peace is a very remarkable event. And its continuance for twelve years, is a circumstance that seems almost miraculous, when we consider the magnitude of the Roman empire, and its various parts—when we reflect on the different dispositions, characters, and interests, of almost "all people, nations, and languages." But this universal harmony, however wonderful, was still to be expected at the birth of him, who was emphatically stiled by the prophet, "The Prince of Peace."

The enrolment, and the time of the enrolment, seem to have been ordered, also, by a particular Providence. Herod, who was now king, received the revenues, and paid Augustus an appointed tribute. The enrolment, therefore, was not to collect a tax: it was, merely, to ascertain the strength of the empire. This enrolment would have taken place, twenty-seven years before, according to the proclamation of Augustus, in Tarragon, a city of Spain; but was apparently prevented by political disasters. It was, however, predetermined by the Almighty, and fixed to this very moment, in subservience to that grand event, the birth of Christ.

* Sueton. ii. 22.

The *place*, where Our Saviour was born, is not less worthy of observation, than the crisis of his nativity. "Joseph (says the Evangelist) went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David; to be enrolled with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth a son *." On this plain statement of facts, the obvious remark is, that the birth of Christ in Bethlehem is solely attributable to the circumstance of the enrolment: had not this political enquiry been so ordered, "the days when Mary should be delivered," would probably have been "accomplished," in the city of Nazareth.

But the prophets foretold the place of the nativity, as well as its pacific conjuncture. Had Christ, then, been born at Nazareth, or in a time of war, how could the prophets have been fulfilled?

The subject seems farther to suggest, that had Our Saviour been born at any other time and place, or rather, at the private house of his friends, the event would not have been publicly recorded. It might have been related in the Sacred Scriptures; but have remained unconfirmed by Pagan testimonies.

On reviewing the whole of this singular transaction, we cannot but observe Augustus Cæsar, an

* St. Luke, ii. 4—7.

unconscious instrument of Providence, in ushering the Prince of Peace into the world; amidst the general harmony; in determining the place of his birth; in recording his nativity; and in publishing it to mankind.

Through Augustus were accomplished those prophecies which foretold the auspicious season of the birth of Jesus: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation*." "And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them." "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock." "They shall not hunt, nor destroy, in all my holy mountain.†."

Through Augustus, also, was accomplished the prediction, which pointed out the very spot of the nativity: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah; yet out of thee shall *He* come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel—whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.‡."

* Isaiah, ij. 4.

† Isaiah, lxy. 21—25.

‡ Micah, v. 2.

THE WISE MEN OF THE EAST.

THE Jews had long looked to some great person, who, born in Judea, should subdue the nations around them, and establish a universal dominion.

And they ardently expected his appearance about the time of Our Saviour's nativity. This expectation was founded on the prophetic Scriptures; the most remarkable of which were the following: "There shall come a star out of Jacob; and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel: out of Jacob, shall come he, that shall have dominion*." And "thou Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee, shall come forth a ruler†." But from these Scriptures, the Jews conceived no other idea, than that of a temporal ruler.

It was an earthly kingdom only, which they imagined, who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem‡," and who "trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel§."

In the mean time, the Heathen were equally prepossessed with the notion, that, at this conjuncture, a great deliverer was to come into the world.

* Numbers, xii. 17.

† Micah, v. 2.

‡ St. Luke, xi. 38.

§ St. Luke, xxiv. 21.

The

The Cumæan Sybil predicted the Advent of such a potentate: and, whilst poets caught inspiration from the oracle, historians recorded it. The *Pollio* of Virgil, is the Messiah of the Prophet: and the Conqueror from Judea, as marked in the pages of Suetonius and Tacitus, is but the same glorious person whom Haggai styles "the desire of all nations *." Suetonius tells us: "Percrebuerat opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judea profecti rerum potirentur †." Tacitus repeats almost the words of Suetonius: "Pluribus (says he) persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judea rerum potirentur †."

It is very remarkable, that these historians, instead of rejecting this prophecy as improbable, or ridiculing it as a mere popular absurdity, united in applying it to the Roman Emperor himself. No-

* Haggai, ii. 7.

† Sueton. viii. 4.

‡ Tacit. Annal. i. 21. According to Josephus, the principal motive which induced the Jews to undertake the war against the Romans, was the above prophecy: viz. that "in those days a person should come out of Judea, who should have the command of the whole world." This prediction the Jews applied to their own nation. And "the error (says the Jewish historian,) prevailed even among men of superior rank; whilst, in fact, the prophecy related to Vespasian, who, when in Judea, became an Emperor." Here, the error is, undoubtedly, the historian's. Yet there was one common mistake, in applying the prophecy to a temporal ruler, when it ought to have been referred to the great Spiritual Deliverer of the world. See Joseph. lib. 7. c. 31. 1.1 2

thing

thing can be more extraordinary, than that the most polished of the Roman people, should have thus turned their attention to so obscure a corner of the world as Judea, and have so far credited the prediction, as to distort its meaning by an unnatural effort, and force it into the service of Vespasian. This, undoubtedly proves, that the prophecy had made a deep impression on their minds.

We have to notice, then, not only the high *antiquity* of the prophecy, and the *universality* of its acceptance, but its great weight or *authority* with all—whether to the east or to the west; whether Jews or Gentiles, Barbarians or Romans, the unlettered multitude, or the historian and the poet. Not only the Jews believed it, from generation to generation, but the whole east had adopted it, as true, had transmitted it from age to age, and were now awaiting its accomplishment with anxious expectation. And its momentousness as “an opinion of the East,” was such, as to excite a lively interest in the minds of the people of Rome.

From these premises, we may be prepared for one of the most singular events in history; I mean the progress of the Eastern Sages, from their country to the land of Judea, in search of the new-born Prince.

Had not the Roman historians described the belief of the prophecy, as existing from ancient times, and still prevailing over all the East, we might read with increasing wonder, St. Luke's narrative of the Wise Men; and a sceptic might doubt its authenticity.

tificity. But the two historians throw a strong light on the Evangelist.

According to St. Matthew: "when Jesus was
 " born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of He-
 " rod the king, there came Wise Men from the East
 " to Jerusalem—saying, Where is He, that is born
 " king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the
 " East, and are come to worship him. When He-
 " rod the king heard these things, he was troubled,
 " and all Jerusalem with him. And when he ga-
 " thered all the Chief Priests and Scribes of the
 " people, together, he demanded of them where
 " Christ should be born. And they said unto him,
 " In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written of
 " the prophet: " And thou Bethlehem in the land
 " of Judea, art not the least among the princes of
 " Judea: For out of thee shall come a governor, who
 " shall rule my people Israel." Then Herod, when
 " he had privily called the Wise Men, enquired of
 " them diligently what time the star appeared.
 " And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said: Go,
 " and search diligently for the young child; and
 " when ye have found him, bring me the word again,
 " that I may come and worship him also. When
 " they had heard the king, they departed. And
 " lo, the star which they saw in the East went be-
 " fore them, till it came and stood over where the
 " young child was. When they saw the star they
 " rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when
 " they were come into the house, they saw the
 " young child with Mary his mother, and fell down
 " and

“and worshipped him; and when they had opened
 “their treasures, they presented unto him gifts—
 “gold, and frankincense, and myrrh; and being
 “warned of God, in a dream, that they should not
 “return to Herod, they departed into their own
 “country another way.”*

That the Eastern sages actually left their country in pursuit of this unknown person, we presume to be more than probable, when we consider it in connexion with the heathen records of the prophecy; and, admitting this to be a fact, we regard the rest of St. Matthew's narrative as equally true.

But *how* this prophecy should have first prevailed in the east, and *how* it could have made so deep and so lasting an impression there, have spread through the Roman Empire, and even have been received as worthy credit by the most enlightened minds; or, *why* the great Potentate described should come from Judea in particular, or should arise at the period expected, and at no other; these are questions which, reasoning from the ordinary course of things, we should be utterly incapable of resolving. Still more *unaccountable* on the ground of common experience (though the facts are equally admissible) are the progress of the Eastern sages to Judea, the consternation of Herod and his court, and all Jerusalem, merely from the report of a few strangers; and, particularly, the homage of the sages to a poor unconscious babe of Bethlehem. Ani-

* St. Matthew, ii. 1—12.

mated by the idea of a venerable prophecy, now on the very point of its completion, deeming themselves the heralds of its accomplishment to an expecting world; elated with the hope of paying their adoration to a prince, whose external splendour would speak his designation; we can imagine them, after their long and wearisome journey through the sands of the desert, arrived at the metropolis of Judea (where, if any where, they were likely to succeed in their pursuit) and there eagerly enquiring for the new-born "King of the Jews;" and, we may observe them inspired with a new confidence as they perceived the alarm of Herod and his court, since they might well conclude from this circumstance, that the expectation of the Jews coincided with their own.

But is it possible to conceive them at the very moment of their highest mental elevation, entering a mean cottage in the town of Bethlehem; and as soon as they espied a poor infant in the arms of his mother, falling down and worshipping that infant, and presenting to him gifts—gold and frankincense and myrrh—offerings, which indicated, among the oriental nations, a mighty prince, a universal monarch? No, surely. Such conduct is inconceivable, on the ground of human probability.

Yet these, we may be assured, were facts. The progress of the magi was in the face of the world. It was directed from Arabia to Judea, by the impulse of the prophecy: it was directed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by the Jewish priests and scribes,

scribes, and even by Herod himself—all over-awed by a mysterious sense of some wonderful nativity.

We must admit, then, the *progress* from the East, to be as true as the belief of the *prophecy* : for the one, we have the authority of the best informed historians ; for the other, of the evangelist.

But, in accounting for either, it would be vain to consult our experience : we must have recourse to a particular ordination and interposition of Providence, and the subject was well worthy of a Divinity. The prince, whose nativity was thus expected and hailed, was a person in whom the world was interested ; in whom not only the Jews but the heathen were interested, far beyond their utmost conceptions of earthly prosperity or grandeur. It, therefore, became the Providence of God to dispose the universal mind, for the advent of this illustrious personage : who was to be “ a light to lighten the “ Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel !” And it equally became the Providence of God to introduce the infant prince to the Jews and to the Gentiles, under every appearance of earthly humility, and to lay prostrate human pomp and vanity, before him whose “ kingdom was not of this world !” But there was a miracle in both. Such a universal expectation, such a lively curiosity, and such trembling apprehension, could never have been excited or kept awake, but through God’s especial influence ; nor, if it did exist, could the sagacity of the eastern philosophers, though pointing to Jerusalem, and even to Bethlehem, have discovered
c “ the

“ the King of the Jews” under the form of a poor suckling, in a cottage. It is probable, had they been guided by their own sagacity only, that, repelled by the mean appearance of the child, they would have abruptly left him, and exclaimed—
 “ Can any good come out of Bethlehem?” Perhaps they were astrologers, and were accustomed to calculate nativities from the observation of the stars; and, as astrologers, they might have looked for some appearance in the heavens, coincident with the prophetic moment. Yet what they saw was supernatural. They saw a new light in the East; but they soon lost sight of it. From Arabia they went to Jerusalem; from Jerusalem they were proceeding to Bethlehem; “ and lo, the star, which they saw in the East, WENT BEFORE THEM, TILL IT CAME AND STOOD OVER WHERE the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”*

From this instant, their hopes and their feelings were no longer human: the phenomenon, whatever it was, was miraculous; and it marked the **MES-
 SIAH!**—the **REDEEMER of Mankind!**

It has been insinuated that the Eastern philosophers, though they might have made obeisance before the infant Jesus, were as yet as ignorant of the Divine person whom they worshipped, as were the priests and even Herod himself, who directed them to Bethlehem. What end, therefore, it is asked,

* St. Matt. ii. 9, 10.

could

could this blind worship have answered; either to themselves or to the world?

I conceive, I may, with propriety, object to this assumption of the question—that “the philosophers were ignorant of the person whom they worshipped.” Their embassy was, indisputably, from God. Whatever the star might have been, whether an appearance visible to themselves alone, or conspicuous to all, still the phenomenon was miraculous; it was a guide from heaven. Chalcidius, the Platonist, in his commentary on *Timæus*, thus observes: “Est quoque alia sanctior et venerabilior historia, quæ perhibet ortu stellæ cujusdam non morbos mortisque denunciata, sed descensum Dei venerabilis ad humanæ conservationis, rerumque mortalium gratiam: quam stellam cum nocturno itinere inspexissent Chaldæorum profecto sapientes viri, et consideratione rerum celestium satis exercitati, quæsisse dicuntur recentem ortum Dei, repertaque illa majestate puerili veneratos esse, et vota Deo tantò convenientiæ nuncupasse.”*

That

* This star could not have been one of the heavenly orbs, but must have been some new and extraordinary appearance in the air. It was designed to shew the place of Christ's nativity; and it actually did point out the place which no regular star or planet could have done. It moved also at intervals; and it moved from north to south.

Some learned men, therefore, are of opinion, that this star-like phenomenon might have been that glorious light which shone upon the shepherds of Bethlehem, when the angel came to communicate to them the tidings of our Saviour's birth—an ex-

That these philosophers were afterwards instructed in their route, by a divine communication, and that they implicitly followed this instruction, we are expressly informed by the Evangelist.*

Why, then, are we to presume, that these Eastern Sages remained unenlightened by divine truth? Both themselves and their countrymen, to whom they, doubtless, announced the birth of Jesus, might have reaped essential advantages from their heavenly embassy.

But the success of their journey, corresponding with the expectation of the whole eastern and west-

ceedingly great light—"the Glory of the Lord." Such a light, at distance (say they) might have appeared like a star—might have really taken that form—might have drawn the wise men from Arabia to Judea—and might have gone before them in the air, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, gradually descending, and at length standing over the very house, where lay the infant Jesus,

In this case, the star which the wise men saw, must have appeared to them on the very day when Christ was born; for on that day or night, according to St. Luke, the light shone about the shepherds.

The wise men, therefore, must have travelled from their own country, to Bethlehem, much more expeditiously, than we can reasonably imagine—allowing due credit to the swiftness of their dromedaries.

At all events, I should conceive, that the light was supernatural; but can see no reason, why it should have been that identical light which was exhibited to the shepherds. The Deity could with as much ease, have produced a new light, for the accomplishment of his purpose, as have employed that which was exhibited to the shepherds.

* St. Matt. ii. 12.

ern world, and thus marking the completion of a long established prophecy, was an event of such general notoriety, that, whatever was its final cause, we must necessarily consider it as an historic fact. The whole world were spectators of it: and St. Matthew has related it, with all that simplicity which, arising from a consciousness of truth, seems assured of being credited.

to be called upon to give an account of his conduct
 and to have an opportunity of clearing himself

from all charges of immorality and of being
 unworthy of the office of prophet. I shall only
 observe, that he was, generally, received by the Jews, as a
 prophet; that he was so received, without any no-
 tion of his connexion with our Saviour; and that,
 from his popularity, he might have opposed his
 pretensions to those of Christ, with every prospect
 of success, had he not been really connected with
 our Saviour, in the manner represented in the Scrip-
 tures.

JOHN THE BAPTIST. I shall only
 observe, that he was, generally, received by the Jews, as a
 prophet; that he was so received, without any no-
 tion of his connexion with our Saviour; and that,
 from his popularity, he might have opposed his
 pretensions to those of Christ, with every prospect
 of success, had he not been really connected with
 our Saviour, in the manner represented in the Scrip-
 tures.

The Jewish historians describe John as a prophet:
 and Josephus, in particular, bears witness to his
 public ministry, and his singular character and ex-
 traordinary success as a Baptist. This historian,
 indeed, speaks of John in terms of high veneration;
 informs us that the people followed him with every
 mark of love and reverence; that the King became
 jealous of his reputation; and that, in the public
 opinion, the blood of John provoked the wrath of
 heaven, and occasioned the destruction of Herod's
 army.*

* Joseph. Antiqu. l. 18. c. 7.

This account exactly accords with that of the Gospels. Herod had shut up John in prison; yet permitted his disciples to converse with him, and a long while forbore to put him to death, through fear of the people, and from some degree of personal respect for the prophet; and resigned him, at last, with sorrow, to the malice of Herodias.*

That John was deemed a prophet, unconnected with Christ, is sufficiently clear from the mention of his disciples still faithful to their master, and visiting him in prison, while Christ was exercising *his* ministry in its full extent—from the preference of John's austerities to the more affable manners of our Saviour—and from the Jews, who, ignorant as they were of Christ, had received the baptism of John.†

It appears, then, from the Jewish historians and from the Scriptures, that John was extremely popular among the Jews in his prophetic character, and that he had gained a number of proselytes who had no view to the Messiah.

From these circumstances, we may fairly conclude, that, had he not recognized his relative situation with our Saviour; had he not known himself to be the forerunner of Christ, and Christ to be the Son of God; he would not have submitted his own pretensions to our Saviour, but have set up his claim to independence, a formidable rival.

* Matth. xiv. 5. Mark vi. 20.

† Matt. ix. 14. xi. 2. Acts xviii. 24. xix. 2.

But he understood, full well, his connexion with Christ. It was with deep humility, that he declared: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." "He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above, is above all: He, that is of the earth, is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He that cometh from heaven, is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony. He, that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true: For he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: And he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life."*

* John iii. 28—36.

THE

THE MESSENGERS OF JOHN.

THE proofs of our Saviour's divine mission very frequently appear, in his answers to the accidental questions of others.

His answer to the two messengers whom John sent into Jerusalem, saying: "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" is very remarkable. "Go your way (says he) and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the Poor* the Gospel is preached."†

* It was to the poor and the humble in spirit, that the Gospel was preached with every prospect of success. They were prepared for evangelical truth, and willing to receive it.

I see no reason, however, for rejecting the literal meaning of the words. Our Saviour preferred the conversion of people in low situations, to that of the scribes and the pharisees. He was the instructor of the unaffectedly ignorant—of those who knew little, and who pretended not to knowledge. Such persons were chiefly men of low condition. To their capacities he adapted his simple, intelligible doctrines, in contradistinction with the vain traditions of the pharisees, and the allegorical interpretations of the Rabbis.

† St. Luke vii. 20. 22.

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The miracles to which he here refers, are placed upon a footing with his preaching the Gospel to the poor. The one had the same charitable aspect as the other. And, so fully engaged was our Saviour by his benevolent feelings for mankind, that even here, where he is questioned respecting his own pretensions, he is scarcely able to detach his miracles from the circumstances of charity which invest them, or survey them in the pure light of their divinity; though, to make out his proper claim to the character he assumed, it was natural to apply the glory of them to himself. An impostor would have given a very different answer: our Saviour's was the spontaneous effusion of a more than human mind impressed with infinite benevolence and love, and too familiar with omnipotence to be struck by the greatness of a miracle, or elated by the wonders that he performed among men. The stupendous appearance of a miraculous deed, as adding dignity to himself, would have been a more obvious idea to a mere earthly being, than the beautiful effects of it, as contributing to the happiness of others. On the former, he would have enlarged; endeavouring to guard against the suspicion of imposture: the latter he would have left unnoticed.

THE

THE LITTLE CHILDREN.

AMONG the incidental proofs of our Saviour's divinity, I have always numbered those familiar expressions which argue his perfect intimacy with Heaven and its inhabitants.

The little children that are brought unto Christ, afford a pleasing illustration of this remark. "Jesus called a little child; and set him in the midst of his disciples, and said: Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."—"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven." *

In these passages, particularly the last, † our Saviour's

* Matt. xviii. 1, 2,—10. It is said, that Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch) was the little child whom Jesus set in the midst of his disciples. ++

† According to St. Jerome, each of these *little ones* has, from his

Saviour's personal acquaintance with Heaven is strikingly displayed.

Here, (as every where else) our Lord speaks of the kingdom of Heaven, of his Father, and of the angels, in the same style of familiarity in which we speak of our home; in the same affectionate terms, in which we notice our domestic endearments.

Of such, too, he speaks, as of things which are self-evident, which are no subjects for doubt or disputation. He never attempts to prove the existence of the invisible world or its inhabitants; but, in spontaneous language, as occasions offer, and by a candid, open, and impressive manner, that carries conviction to the mind, discovers his acquaintance with them all.

his birth, an angel delegated to preserve him, and guard him from injury. In the opinion of others, the idea of tutelary angels, individually watching over their own particular saints, has no foundation in scripture. Yet the angels in Heaven are "ministering Spirits" to the Saints. "They go in and out, before the glory of the Holy One;" and execute his commands with respect to the inhabitants of the earth.

ZACCHEUS.

ZACCHEUS.

THE interview between Jesus and Zaccheus, is described in the nineteenth chapter of St. Luke.

With respect to the station and character of Zaccheus, it appears, that he was the chief among the publicans or revenue-officers, and that he was extremely rich.

The publicans were, under the Roman government, the instruments of great oppression, and extremely obnoxious to the Jewish people: and Zaccheus was not only a chief publican, but had accumulated wealth, probably by acts of tyranny and peculation.

This man, as our Saviour passed through Jericho, sought "to see Jesus, who he was." The first impulse by which he was governed, was, probably, no other than curiosity. But it was an ardent curiosity. For not being able to see our Saviour "for the press, because he was little of stature; he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree, to see him; for he was to pass that way. And, when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him,

“him, and said unto him, Zaccheus! make haste, and come down: For, to-day, I must abide at thy house.”

This is an astonishing incident. That our Saviour should distinguish by peculiar marks of favor, a person who was far gone in wickedness,—that he should thus honour, in the face of a vast crowd of people, a character from which they all revolted with antipathy, a man no less despised for the insignificance of his figure, than abhorred for his iniquitous exactions, is, upon human principles, a conduct most anomalous. Would any earthly teacher have thus exposed himself to the wrath of the multitude; and to the apparent caprice of a moment have sacrificed all his popularity? At the instance of our Lord, Zaccheus “made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, that he was gone to be a guest with a man that was a sinner. And Zaccheus stood and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: And, if I have taken any thing from any man, by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him; This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he, also, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come, to seek and to save that which was lost.”

If Zaccheus was actually a sinner as I have represented him, and as it should appear, from our Saviour's declaration that he “was come to seek and to save that which was lost;” his joyful reception

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THE GREEKS, DESIRING TO SEE JESUS.

FROM that fondness for novelty which was characteristic of their countrymen, it is conceived, that the Greeks who desired to see Jesus were prompted by mere curiosity. They are described, however, as "worshippers at the feast"—the worshippers of the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth: we may, therefore, fairly attribute their wish to see our Saviour to a nobler motive. They "believed in God:" And, if their belief were founded in just principles, it was *natural*, that they should "believe, also, in Christ." Yes! I maintain, that it was *natural*, in spite of modern theism, which would annihilate a Providence, and, every way, disconnect the Creator from his creatures. If they were at all acquainted with the perfections of the Deity, and sensible of the insufficiency of human nature; if they had any notion of the relative connection between man and his Maker, they must, of necessity, have perceived their unworthiness in approaching God. They must have been conscious of infirmities that craved assistance; of
ignorance,

ignorance, that required instruction. In this case, how natural was it to form the idea of some Being able and ready to interpose between them and their God; of some one, equally powerful and benevolent, who might strengthen their weakness, and rescue them from error.

That the heathen were actually impressed with such a conviction of their comparative imbecility, is indisputably clear, from their oracles, divinations, and auguries; by which alone they presumed to communicate with the Deity, or expected to derive some rays of information, amidst a world of darkness.

The wise and amiable Socrates, who had a deeper insight into human nature, than any of the heathen, suspected that man, so noble and yet so mean, so great in his conceptions, yet so little in his exertions, was very far from what he originally was, when he became an inhabitant of the earth. From his internal feelings, from an intimate knowledge of himself and others, if not from the propitiatory sacrifice, he was sensible, that some great incident must have happened to detach and alienate the creature from the Creator. And he was hence assured that a divine guide, a spiritual instructor, a mediator, was yet wanting, to point out the path of rectitude to erring mortals; to enlighten their minds, and to reconcile them to themselves and to their God. And he even cherished the hope, that, at some time or other, such a personage would come into the world.

It was not a vague or indistinct idea of the probability of a divine revelation that Socrates entertained. He seems to have had a clear prospect of a messenger from Heaven who should dissipate the clouds of error; of a more than mortal being—(it should almost seem) of the Divinity himself. His perception of the main office of the Messiah, of “the anointed of the Lord to preach the Gospel,” seems to surpass that of human intelligence. In “the Alcibiades the second” of Plato, Socrates is introduced describing to his pupil, “a PERSON “who should, some time or other, come into the “world, and remove THE DARKNESS that hung “over our faculties, and teach us our duty towards “God and towards men.” Alcibiades enquires: “When will that time come? And who is that “person, who shall thus instruct mankind?” “It “is HE (says Socrates) *who now takes care of you:* “and HIS concern for you is wonderful.” Alcibiades declares, that he is “ready to wait for that “time,” and expresses his “hope, that yet a little “while, and that TIME WILL COME.”

From these general observations, we pass to a particular notice of the incident of “the Greeks at “Jerusalem.” Our Saviour had just made his entry into Jerusalem, at the time of the Jewish pass-over (a season exactly appropriate and peculiarly favourable to his manifestation of himself, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles); the multitude had hailed his coming with hosannas, and the pharisees had exclaimed in envy, “Behold, the world is gone “after

“after him!” When “certain Greeks who came
 “up to worship at the feast,” desired Philip to in-
 troduce them to Jesus; “Philip cometh, and telleth
 “Andrew; and again, Andrew and Philip told
 “Jesus.”

Who these Greeks were,* what religion they pro-
 fessed,† or how they became acquainted with Phi-
 lip, I shall not attempt to conjecture. Let us ad-
 vert to our Saviour’s answer, which is very remark-
 able. “THE HOUR IS COME, that the Son of man
 “should be glorified;” should be glorified by the
 faith of the Gentiles. “If any man serve me, let
 “him follow me; and WHERE I AM, there shall,
 “also, my servant be.” “Now is the judgment
 “of this world: now shall the Prince of this world
 “be cast out.” Now shall Satan, whom the world
 worshippeth under the various forms of Polytheism,
 be expelled from his idolatrous temples. “Yet a
 “LITTLE WHILE is the light with you: Walk,
 “whilst ye have the light, lest DARKNESS come
 “upon you.” In a subsequent conversation with

* Grotius is of opinion, that these Greeks were Syropheni-
 cians, perhaps dwelling in the neighbourhood of Tyre or Sidon;
 and thus might easily have been acquainted with the Galileans,
 (from the commercial intercourse of these places with Galilee)
 and consequently, with Philip of Bethsaida, whom they desired
 to introduce them to our Saviour.

† Dr. Hammond thinks, that these Greeks were proselytes of
 the gate; at least who worshipped the God of the Jews as the
 Creator of Heaven and earth; such as were Cornelius and the
 treasurer of Queen Candace.

his disciples, our Saviour says: "I will come again, and receive you to myself, that, where I am, ye may be, also." "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE: NO MAN COMETH TO THE FATHER, BUT BY ME." *

This incident of "the Greeks at Jerusalem," is beautifully illustrated by the above passage in Plato. Little as the conjecture, or rather the prophetic announcement of Socrates, has been noticed by theologians, I cannot but consider it as suggested by that sense of human depravity and weakness which a Christian must necessarily feel, before he can fly for succour to the great Restorer of our fallen nature; a sense so strong as to render the philosopher almost certain of such a Restorer, about to "manifest himself in the FLESH," yet even then SPIRITUALLY PRESENT to the humble and the pious.

If the Greeks who were thus anxious to approach our Saviour, had been conversant with Plato, they might have recognized the Divine Person who should come into the world, and teach mankind, "ὡς δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἑταίρους διακρίβου." If they had asked with Alcibiades, "Πότε ἢ παραισέτις ὁ Χρῆστος εὐτος, καὶ τίς ὁ κλεινόν;" they might have cried out, with the Philosopher, "Ὅλος ἐστίνω, μέλας, μέγας, ἀγρός," and have remembered the hope of the disciple, that the Lord would come, "ὅτι ἔρχεται μετὰ." Yes! they are the words almost, of the Saviour himself. "The hour is

* St. John, xii. 13.

"come,

"come," (said Christ, when the Greeks were announced to him) *ἤλθον ἡμεῖς ἵνα δεῶμεν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.*

And, as to his *essential presence* with His disciples, of which Socrates seems to have conceived so just an idea: *Εάν μοι διακονή τις, ἐμὴ ἀκλὺθειώ· καὶ οὐδὲ εἰμι ἐγὼ, ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ διακονῶν ὁ υἱὸς ἐστί.*

And, as the philosopher had said, *ὁ μὲν καὶ πρὸς σὺν* it is He; it is "He only that careth for you," so said the blessed Jesus, in these consolatory words: *οὐδεὶς ἠγάπησέν με ὡς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀγαπᾷ με ὥστε ἑαυτὸν ὑποθέσθαι ὑπὲρ μου.*

And "οὕτω μὲν καὶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς," says St. Peter,*

"Yet a little while" *ὅσον χρόνον μέλει.* (says Alcibiades) "and I hope that light of which you speak, will come to enlighten me." "Yet a little while," *ὅσον χρόνον μέλει,* (says our Saviour) "is the light with you. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

It is a very striking circumstance, that both Socrates and Christ, for the consolation of their respective disciples, speak not only of the *bodily* but the *essential* presence and providence, of Him who was "the way, the truth, and the life;" and that, owing to the rapid transition from the idea of body to that of spirit, they speak with the same degree of obscurity: So that the disciples, neither of Christ nor of Socrates, conceive at once the meaning of the terms.

At all events, the conversation between the phi-

* 1 Epist. v. 7.

philosopher and his disciple, as reported by Plato, must be allowed to furnish a very pleasing illustration of the Sacred Text which describes our Saviour coming to Jerusalem, and the Jews and the Gentiles hailing his approach. And, whilst the Jews exclaimed: "Οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνβρις υἱὸς Ἡρακλῆος τοῦ ἑσπερίου." * "This is He, that was spoken of by Esaias the prophet!"—Well might the Greeks have cried: "Οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ φιλόσοφος υἱὸς Σωκράτους τοῦ φιλοσόφου!" "This is He, that was spoken of by Socrates the philosopher!"

* St. Matt. iii. 8.

THE BUYERS AND SELLERS IN THE TEMPLE.

IN the simple language of the Evangelist, we are informed, that, as "the Jews passover was at hand; Jesus went up to Jerusalem; and found in the Temple those that sold oxen and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and, when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, 'Take these things hence: make not my father's house an house of merchandise.' And his disciples remembered that it was written, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'"

Though we do not rank this transaction among our Saviour's actual miracles, yet we think it so far out of the common course of things, as to throw light on his Divinity.

* St. John, ii. 13—17.

The traders had erected their seats and stalls in the courts of the Temple; and were selling their oxen, sheep, and doves, for the sacrifices of the passover, under the authority of the priests and rulers of the Jews. Unconscious, therefore, of any profanation of the Temple, or any degree of irregularity, it is extraordinary, that they should all have given way to the violence of an intruder; that they should even have fled, intimidated by a stranger, and suffered him, without resistance, to "pour out the changers money, and overthrow the tables."

The strongest of all human motives, is that of interest. And, where this principle of action meets the sanction of the laws, and even that of our own conscience, there are few countervailing motives to check its operation,

The merchants were in the very act of gratifying their love of gain, when our Saviour entered the precincts of the Temple. And, that, in the opinion of his disciples, he had exposed himself to great danger, is evident from their recollection of a text in the Psalmist as applicable to their Lord; "The zeal of their house hath eaten me up."

Our conclusion is, that the traders were all struck with terror, at the wonderful energy of our Saviour's power; and that they fled from the presence of a Being more than human.

JUDAS

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

THE character and conduct of Judas Iscariot furnish, I think, a most convincing proof of our Saviour's blameless life and conversation.

If we view Jesus in the circle of his own immediate followers, if we mark him, in his retired moments; we shall see Judas a spy upon his actions, a minute observer of all his discourses.

On a supposition, indeed, that Judas Iscariot was our Saviour's undisguised adherent, till the very period, when, seduced by gain, he deserted his Lord; he would, nevertheless, had he been able, have brought some specific accusation against the person whom he betrayed.

Could he have recollected any inconsistencies or improprieties in a single action or discourse of Jesus, he would, doubtless, have communicated them to Christ's accusers, were it only to palliate his own behaviour, by giving an aspect of justice to his treachery.

Tempted and bribed by those dazzling lures which so often draw men into perdition, he was unable

unable to furnish the enemies of Christ with the slightest matter of accusation. All he could do was, simply, to deliver up his Lord to persecution. And, no sooner had he thus infamously acted, than, penetrated by remorse of conscience, he returned the price of his iniquity, publicly confessed his crime in having betrayed the innocent blood, and put an end to his own life, in despair.

Had he previously represented our Saviour, as guilty of the most trivial offence, they who heard his recantation, would have upbraided him with palpable inconsistency. But what was their answer? "I have sinned (said Judas) in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!" And they said: "What is that to us? See thou to that."

St. Matthew thus proceeds with the narration of this transaction: "And Judas cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, 'It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.' And they took counsel, and bought with them the Potter's Field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore, that field was called, 'The Field of Blood,' unto this day."* From this account, St. Luke has somewhat varied, in the Acts of the Apostles.† "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and

* St. Matt. xxviii. 4—8. † 12: 10.

"all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem: Inasmuch, as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, the Field of Blood."

That the history of the whole transaction is true, we need not doubt, from the minuteness of the circumstances. To reconcile, indeed, the difference of St. Matthew and St. Luke, relative to the death of Judas, we must suppose, that the traitor hanged himself on some tree at the brink of a precipice, and that, the branch breaking, he fell headlong, and dashed himself to pieces, inasmuch that his bowels gushed out.

Nothing, however, can more satisfactorily authenticate the story, than the mention of the Potter's Field, as purchased with the money for which Judas betrayed his master. This is a public appeal to a public transaction.

If Judas, then, who was a companion of our Saviour, who joined him daily in social converse, and might have marked his discourses more narrowly from a jealous attention to his communication with the favoured disciple; if Judas could not call to memory one idle word that dropped from our blessed master's tongue, at those seasons, when the heart is more than usually expanded, and the judgment less watchful over its warm and rapid effusions; when even the most perfect men are conscious of having uttered many things which are unfit for the public, and would shrink from the test of enquiry; if such were the case, we may well believe,

believe, that whatever Jesus Christ had "spoken" "in the closet," might have been proclaimed, to his honour, on the housetop. *Matthew 10:27* and on "the roof-tops."

And, "with respect to the actions of our Lord," the same observation will prove equally just. For if Judas could have exclaimed with Pilate, "I find no fault in him!" (and Judas declared more than this), we may triumphantly conclude, that he was equally inoffensive both in word and deed. Our Saviour, therefore, was perfect innocence. And, as innocence can never consist with hypocrisy, he was no impostor in his claims to the Messiahship. If no impostor, therefore, he was the true Messiah.

THE TWO FALSE WITNESSES.

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THE TWO FALSE WITNESSES.

IF we accompany our blessed Saviour, when betrayed into the hands of his enemies, to the palace of the High-Priest, we shall there contemplate his character in the most interesting point of view; as his innocence will appear to gain lustre from malevolence.

“The chief priests and elders, and all the council (says St. Matthew*) sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death, but found none. Yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last, came *two false witnesses*, and said: This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’”

It is worthy of observation, that the words which these false witnesses here misrepresent, were spoken by our Saviour full three years before: In these, or in similar expressions, he predicted the resurrection of his body.

* St. Matthew, xxvi. 59.

This awful prediction, then, is made the subject of accusation against Christ. And that nothing which he said or did, within a less space of time, could be produced or found in evidence against him, with any appearance of truth, or colour of probability, must impress us with the idea of perfection beyond the reach of humanity.

When he asserted himself to be the Son of God, his judges cried, that he had spoken blasphemy: Well might the Evangelist retort the charge upon his Judges; "because He *was* the Son of God!" *

* St. Luke xxii. 65.

ST.

ST. PETER.

THE life of St. Peter must be reviewed by the sincere Christian with emotions of pain and pleasure. His affectionate disposition, his quick sensibility, the precipitate expression of his feelings, his warm attachment to virtue, yet his irresolution in the hour of danger, the fervour of his faith, and the errors of his practice, are features of his character, in the contemplation of which we are often delighted and as often grieved. Frequently hurried from the right path, by the impetuosity of his passions, he felt the deepest compunction whenever he offended: Immediately as his conscience smote him, his honest heart acknowledged the offence: and he confessed his sin with sorrow and contrition.

On every emergency, his zeal for his Lord is discoverable; a zeal, that sometimes transported him into strange excesses.

We see St. Peter in many striking attitudes. We perceive his courage and his cowardice, his heavenly faith and his human imbecility, his Christian holiness and worldly-mindedness, his spiritual aspirations and carnal desires, alternately prevailing.

But,

But, perhaps, we observe him in no attitude more striking, than where he is attending on his master at the palace of the High-Priest; especially as he, there, brings us to a nearer view of our Saviour's divine nature; as (in an instance that seems to have been little regarded) he momentarily lifts the veil that hid from mortal eyes one of the attributes of the Deity.

It is to this point, that I would wish to fix attention. I shall wave, therefore, all observation on the various passions that agitated St. Peter, at this momentous crisis; considering only his relative situation with our Saviour.

According to St. Matthew, Peter followed Jesus *afar off* to the high-priest's palace, and *went in*, and *sat with the servants*, to see the end.

During our Saviour's examination, Peter was "sitting without in the palace. And a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou, also, wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And, when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And, after a while, came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou, also, art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered

" the

“ the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before
 “ the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And
 “ he went out, and wept bitterly.” *

In St. Mark, “ Peter followed Jesus *afar off*,
 “ even into the palace of the High-Priest: † And
 “ he *sat with the servants*, and warmed himself at
 “ the fire.” And again, as our Saviour stood be-
 fore the high-priest, “ Peter *was beneath in the*
 “ *palace*: and there cometh one of the maids of
 “ the high-priest. And when she saw Peter warm-
 “ ing himself, she looked upon him and said, ‘ And
 “ thou, also, wast with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But
 “ he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand
 “ I what thou sayest. And he went out into the
 “ porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw
 “ him again, and began to say to them that stood
 “ by, This is one of them. And he denied it again.
 “ And a little after, they that stood by, said again
 “ to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: For thou
 “ art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.
 “ But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I
 “ know not this man of whom ye speak. And the
 “ second time the cock crew. And Peter called to
 “ mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before
 “ the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.
 “ And when he thought thereon he wept.” ‡

The parallel passage in St. Luke, is as follows:
 “ Then brought they Jesus into the high-priest’s

* St. Matt. xxvi. 69—75.

† St. Mark xiv. 54.

‡ St. Mark xiv. 66—72.

" house. And Peter followed *afar off*. And when
 " they had kindled a fire *in the midst of the hall*,
 " Peter *sat down among them*. But a certain maid
 " beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly
 " looked upon him and said, ' This man was also
 " with him.' And he denied him, saying, ' Woman,
 " I know him not.' And, after a little while, ano-
 " ther saw him, and said, ' Thou art also of them.'
 " And Peter said, ' Man, I am not.' And, *about*
 " *the space of one hour after*, another confidently
 " affirmed, saying, ' Of a truth, this fellow also
 " was with him: For he is a Galilean. And Peter
 " said, ' Man, I know not what thou sayest.' And
 " immediately, *while he yet spake*, the cock crew.
 " And THE LORD TURNED, and LOOKED upon
 " Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the
 " Lord, how he had said unto him, ' Before the
 " cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Pe-
 " ter went out, and wept bitterly." *

According to St. John, " Simon Peter followed
 " Jesus, and so did another disciple; who went in
 " with Jesus. But Peter *stood at the door without*.
 " Then that other disciple spake unto her that kept
 " the door, and *brought in Peter*. Then saith the
 " damsel that kept the door unto Peter, ' Art not
 " thou also one of this man's disciples?' He saith,
 " I am not.' And the servants and officers stood
 " there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was
 " cold: and they warmed themselves: And Peter

* St. Luke xxii. 54—62.

" stood

" stood with them, and warmed himself. The
 " high-priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and
 " his doctrine. Jesus answered him, ' I spake
 " openly to the world: I ever taught in the syna-
 " gogue, and in the temple whither the Jews always
 " resort; and in secret, have I said nothing. Why
 " askest thou me? Ask them which heard me what
 " I have said unto them: behold, they know what
 " I said.' And when he had thus spoken, one of
 " the officers which stood by, struck Jesus with
 " the palm of his hand, saying, ' Answerest thou
 " the high-priest so?' Jesus answered him, ' If I
 " have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if
 " well, why smitest thou me?' Now Annas had
 " sent him bound unto Caiphas the high-priest.
 " And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself.
 " They said, therefore, unto him, ' Art not thou,
 " also, one of his disciples? he denied it, and said,
 " I am not. One of the servants of the high-priest,
 " being *his* kinsman, whose ear Peter cut off, saith,
 " Did not I see thee in the garden with him?' Pe-
 " ter then denied again: and immediately the cock
 " crew." *

The Evangelists, we perceive, differ, in regard to
 some trivial circumstances; but, with respect to
 others which should seem, at the first glance, to be
 equally unimportant, they exactly agree. They
 unite in representing St. Peter as *at a distance* from
 our Saviour, and as engaged in *accidental conversa-*

* St. John xviii. 15—27.

tions with several persons; and Jesus, *at the same instant*, before the high-priest, examined with asperity, answering the high-priest's question respecting his pretensions, insulted, buffeted and smitten. Though St. Peter seems to have shifted his situation from one part of the palace to another, (or rather from the porch to the middle of the hall, where he sat among the servants) yet he certainly kept at a considerable distance from our Saviour; which, indeed, he would naturally do, in order, if possible, to preclude the suspicion of his being connected with Christ, and, when suspected and accused of that connexion, of rendering the charge less probable. Besides, we can scarcely conceive, that St. Peter could have had the audacity and effrontery, to declare, that 'he knew not the man,' and to follow up his assertion with oaths and execrations, whilst he was sensibly within the hearing of his Lord and master. Yet Peter must have been within *sight* of Jesus, at the third abjuration: For then "the LORD TURNED AND LOOKED UPON PETER."

Here we see our Saviour, though involved in a business that would sufficiently occupy "the heart and soul and strength" of any human being, yet, all along, attentive to St. Peter, for the most part not within hearing of our Lord in his human character, and sometimes not within sight, and marking the very moment when his prediction of the threefold abjuration was fulfilled, with a LOOK, the expressiveness of which no imagination can conceive,
and

and the effect of which no language can describe! Even admitting, that during the whole process of the examination, St. Peter stood very near our Saviour, and in that position thrice denied him; we can hardly reflect, without astonishment, on that presence of mind, that mental grandeur, that serenity and versatility, which, at such an hour of cruel persecution, could pay a becoming regard to two objects at the same instant, and advert to either, as occasion required! Could a mere man have exclaimed, in answer to his menacing judge, to a judge whom he saw thirsting for his blood, and resolved on his destruction: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right-hand of power, and coming in the clouds * of heaven!" Could a mere man have uttered an apostrophe so awefully sublime, at the moment, when he heard his once affectionate friend, his once zealous disciple, abjuring him with oaths and curses? Would a frail mortal, who had avowed himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, conscious of his hypocrisy, sensible of his blasphemies (for in this case he must have been a hypocrite and a blasphemer): would a child of the dust have stood before the high-priest composed and dignified, for so long a period as is stated by the Evangelist; have calmly observed the murderous rancour of his judges; have meekly, yet not timidly, submitted to mockery and blows, as they spat in his face and smote him with the palms

* St. Matt. xxvi. 64.

of their hands; have attended, in the mean time, to the faithlessness of a follower deemed beyond example honest—a faithlessness enough to rend a human heart asunder—and, then, to close up all, have turned round, and looked on that apostate friend; could an earthly criminal, at the very crisis of condemnation and desertion, have supported his simulated character, and concealed his guilty terrors, his confusion of soul, under the masques of intrepidity, patience, innocence? Impossible. No mortal could have *thus stood* before his judge; no mortal could have *thus looked* on his disciple!

We are thrilled with fear and gladness at the portrait: “With trembling we rejoice” at the glance of an omnipotent Deity! How various, then, how piercing and how deep, must have been St. Peter’s feelings, at that LOOK, which, instantaneously, declared the PROPHEET, and discovered the GOD!

THE

THE WEEPING FEMALES.

IN the twenty-third chapter of St. Luke, we have this remarkable passage: "And there followed him
 " a great company of people, and of women, which
 " also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus,
 " turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem;
 " weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and
 " for your children. For, behold, the days are
 " coming, in the which they shall say, 'Blessed are
 " the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and
 " the paps which never gave suck.' Then shall
 " they begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,'
 " and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"

On such an occasion, the words of a Saviour must have deeply sunk into the female heart,† at all

* St. Luke xxiii. 27—30.

† The very different manner in which the female sex are treated in the sacred writings from that in which we see them, in profane history, is well worthy our observation.

It was Christianity that exalted woman to her proper station. Paganism hath concurred with Mahometanism, in regarding females

all times ready to vibrate to the touch of sensibility, and peculiarly susceptible of religious impressions.

As Christ proceeds to foretell the fate of Jerusalem, in description appropriated to his female auditors, he retains the authority of the Prophet amidst the ignominy of the cross, and unites with condescension and compassion, the dignity of his office.

males as subservient merely to our interests and our pleasures. But the Christian religion considers them as our companions and friends; as our partners in the comforts of life, and the softeners of our distresses; as partakers of the same promises, and heiresses of the same immortality.

In the instance before us, our Saviour addresses the women that sympathized with him, in his sufferings, in terms of the most affectionate regard. How very different was the behaviour of Socrates, when in prison and condemned to die, even to his own wife—of Socrates, whose wisdom had taught him to be humble, patient, gentle!—"His wife Xantippe (says Plato) was "sitting beside him, with one of his children in her arms, '*bewailing and lamenting him,*'—as women generally do on such "occasions;" (and as the daughters of Jerusalem bewailed and lamented our Saviour.) "Socrates! (said his wife) this is the "last time your friends shall see you!" On which Socrates, "turning to Crito, said: 'Crito, pray send this woman home.' "Accordingly, Crito's attendants carried off Xantippe, who beat "her face, and cried bitterly."—See Plato's Phædon.

THE

THE PENITENT THIEF.

IF we look to our blessed Saviour upon the cross, we must necessarily perceive rays of his divinity, unless "our eyes be blinded, that we cannot see."

The *Penitent Thief* was evidently a believer in Christ; and was impressed with the true notion of our Saviour's spiritual kingdom. And Jesus upon the cross, when the mask of his hypocrisy (if it ever existed) must have dropped off, still spoke in language familiar to Omnipotence: "Dost thou not fear God (said the thief to his brother offender) seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: But this man hath done nothing amiss. Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." And Jesus said unto him: "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Whilst the malefactor displays charity towards his companion, piety towards God, the deepest humiliation on a prospect of his sins, and the strongest faith in Christ, whom, perhaps, until that solemn hour, he had never known or seen,

seen, the Redeemer of the world arrests with eagerness his last and dying moments, for the exhibition of infinite mercy, "not willing that any should perish; but that all should come to repentance."

We observe, then, that even at the approach of death, our Saviour appears a more than human being, whilst he pardons the penitent thief, who took refuge in the Redeemer's merits. Thus, in one moment we see the essential doctrines and sanctions of Christianity exemplified in the persons of the thief, who repents of his sins, and flies to Christ for mercy; and of Christ who graciously receives him, and promises to meet him in Paradise.

THE

THE CENTURION.

THE testimony of the Centurion, and of those "that were with him watching Jesus,"* must, certainly, be accepted as impartial. It is the testimony of those, whom, from habit and education, we should conceive to be strongly prejudiced against Christ and his religion. It is the testimony of heathen soldiers, whom the Roman governor had appointed as a guard over the crucifixion of our Lord. So deeply struck were these persons with the behaviour of Jesus, and with the circumstances attending his death, that they exclaimed: "Truly this was the Son of God."

The Centurion and his men had, evidently, marked our Saviour from the beginning to the end of his sufferings upon the cross, with very great attention. The Centurion, in particular, had placed himself (as St. Mark informs us) "over against Jesus." From that station, he observed, with anxiety, all that our Saviour said and did. Both he and his soldiers saw our Saviour nailed upon the

* St. Matt. xxvii. 54.

cross:

cross: they heard him, in his expiring moments, cry with a loud voice: "Eli, Eli, lama Sabach-thani;" and they saw him yield up the ghost. And, from all they saw and heard, they, doubtless, concluded, that he was more than a man.

From the astonishing events, also, that evidently concurred to distinguish his death, the darkness over all the land, the fissure of the vail of the temple from the top to the bottom, the quaking of the earth, the rending of the rocks, the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of many bodies;—from all these events, the Centurion was, assuredly, convinced, that our Lord was not a mere mortal.

If, then, the closing scene of our Saviour's life operated so forcibly on the mind of a pagan, as to exclude all doubt of his divinity, surely it is impossible that we, who connect his crucifixion with his character as the Redeemer of mankind, should, for an instant, hesitate in exclaiming: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

JOSEPH

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

IT appears from the Evangelic history, that Joseph of Arimathea was a person of some consequence among the Jews. St. Matthew describes him, as “a rich man,” St. Mark, as “a counsellor,” St. Luke, as “an honourable counsellor.” St. Luke mentions only his general character—“a good man and a just.” St. Matthew and St. John, indeed, intimate, that he was a “disciple of Jesus,” but “secretly,” (says the latter) for fear of the Jews: and the other two Evangelists tell us, that “he waited for the kingdom of God.”

There seems, I think, to be some resemblance between Joseph of Arimathea and that young man, who, though apparently convinced of our Saviour’s divine commission,* yet could not prevail upon himself to sell his great possessions, and follow Jesus. This young man appears to have possessed all the candour and ingenuousness that characterize the earlier period of life. His views were just: his

* St. Matt. xix. St. Mark x. St. Luke xviii.

sentiments

sentiments generous. From a child, he had kept the commandments. Yet he was not satisfied with himself. Though he had abstained from murder and adultery and theft and all manner of falshood; though he honoured his father and his mother, and loved his neighbour as himself; yet, on the ground of moral conduct, he was by no means assured of salvation. From a consciousness, that, after he had done all, he was an unprofitable servant, he anxiously wished to be informed, "what good thing he should do, to inherit eternal life?" But, when he was ordered "to sell what he had, and give to the poor, and come and follow Jesus, he went away sorrowful—for he had great possessions."

From St. Mark's account,* it appears, that he was of a humble spirit, and that he entertained the most respectful sentiments for the character of our Lord. For he came "running, and kneeled unto him." He fell down at the feet of Jesus, rich as he was, before he presumed to ask a question. And "Jesus, it is said, beholding him, loved him."

That our Saviour viewed him in an amiable light, and was much interested in his welfare, may be conceived from that regretful apostrophe: "How hard is it, for them that trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God!"

This rich young man, then, (whom St. Luke styles a certain ruler) was immediately brought to

* x. 17.

mind by the portrait of Joseph of Arimathea: perhaps he was the identical personage before us.

If the conjecture be admitted, we shall with pleasure contemplate the gradual progress of Christian faith, in Joseph of Arimathea. We shall perceive this faith to be the effect of rational conviction; not an enthusiastic transport, a mere momentary fervour, but a steady sentiment more and more vigorous, and operating by slow degrees upon the conduct.

And, from the influence of this faith on Joseph, as displayed in his attention to our Saviour's burial, we shall draw conclusions, to silence the sceptic, and give joy to the Christian.

Before his personal acquaintance with Christ, Joseph had conceived a reverential awe for the Teacher sent from God. At his first interview with Jesus, he addressed his "good Master," in an attitude which bespoke his humbleness of mind—a sense of his own unworthiness and our Saviour's dignity. Yet he was deficient in resolution: he had not fortitude enough to sacrifice his possessions to his convictions. Still was he too sincere, to take refuge in his riches—too ingenuous to have recourse to pleasure, and smother his virtuous affections in sensuality. He retained his esteem for Christ, endeavouring, we may suppose, to reconcile his riches with his love; and was again admitted to the presence of Jesus, and, "in secret," became his disciple.

It was, "for fear of the Jews," we are told, that he went not openly to Jesus. And, perhaps, our Saviour,

Saviour, convinced that Joseph's life as well as property would be endangered by an open avowal of his proselytism, readily assented to such private communications.

Our Lord, indeed, might easily have judged, from the disposition of the rich disciple, that his faith would, insensibly, be strengthened, his piety become more fervent, his wisdom more enlightened; and that, after a few interviews, he would blush to put his worldly possessions in competition with his spiritual attainments.

Had such a measure been absolutely necessary before our Saviour's death, he would have sold his property, we may presume, and willingly exposed himself to persecution. For, no sooner was our Saviour crucified, than he repaired to Pilate's house, and "went in BOLDLY," (according to St. Mark) and begged the body of Jesus. It was with more than manly firmness, (a magnanimity of which poor human nature is scarcely capable) that he petitioned the Roman governor, in the face of the Jews, to give him the body of that person, his friend and his Saviour, whom the Jews "had crucified and slain." In a step so hazardous, he could have been supported only by the confidence, that "Jesus was the Christ." In making this application to Pilate, he stood before the public, as a disciple of Jesus: he was regarded by the surrounding Jews with surprise and aversion. And, from succeeding in his petition, he became an object of jealousy and hatred, and was, probably, marked out for destruction.

tion. The Roman governor, it appears, was extremely cautious in this affair. "Pilate marvelled, "if he were already dead." He was, at first, surprised at Joseph's request; and, suspecting artifice, could scarcely believe that Jesus was dead so soon. Nor, till he had enquired of the guard, whether our Saviour was dead, and was assured that Christ had actually expired, would he deliver up the body to Joseph. Joseph, we find, had "a new sepulchre "hewn out of a rock," which was originally intended for himself. This sepulchre was situated (according to St. John's account) in a garden near the place of our Saviour's crucifixion. Joseph, therefore, "having wrapped the body in a fine linen "cloth, laid it in his own tomb, and rolled a great "stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed."

This was a pious office, such as might naturally have been expected from the counsellor of Arimathea. In this instance, at least, Joseph directed his property to the best of purposes. Instead of selling his garden, and bestowing "the price thereof" upon the poor, he reserved it for the spot of his Saviour's burial: "The poor he had always with "him; but Christ he had not always."

On reviewing the whole transaction, we have reason to triumph in the further confirmation of our faith; since, from Joseph's interposition, our Lord's actual decease upon the cross, as witnessed by the Centurion and the soldiers under him, the cautiousness with which Pilate delivered up the body of

F

Christ,

Christ, the very spot hard by the cross where the body was entombed, and the publicity of all these particulars, are brought immediately and distinctly before the eye, and rendered familiar to the apprehension of all.

double
de 2 characters -

NICODEMUS.

THAT our Saviour's doctrine, in the nocturnal conference with Nicodemus, had left a deep and lasting impression on the mind of the Jewish ruler, is sufficiently evident from that passage in St. John, where the chief priests and pharisees are represented as met together with a view to the examination of our Saviour, and as deliberating on his pretensions to the prophetic character. "Why (said the chief priests and pharisees to the officers) why have ye not brought him!" The officers answered, "Never man spake, as this man." "Then answered them the pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law, are cursed." NICODEMUS saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night) "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" They answered and said unto him, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look;

“for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.” And every
 “man went unto his own house.”*

We hear nothing more of Nicodemus, until the period of the crucifixion.

It appears from St. John, that as soon as Joseph was in possession of the body of Jesus, Nicodemus joined him in embalming and depositing the corpse in the sepulchre. “There came, also, Nicodemus (which at the first came to Jesus by night) and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, therefore, because of the Jews preparation-day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.”†

If we reflect on the dignified station and the wisdom of Nicodemus, if we consider that he was a ruler in Israel, we shall not wonder, either at the secrecy of his first visit to our Saviour, or the cautiousness of his apology for Christ, in the Sanhedrim. For his own sake and that of the Jewish nation, he wished to allow himself time and opportunity for inspecting the character of Christ, reviewing his miracles, examining his doctrines, and marking in the prophetic books the descriptions of

* St. John vii. 45—53.

† St. John xix. 39—42.

such

such a personage. And that, after a calm investigation of the matter, Nicodemus really believed in Christ, we have every reason to conclude, from his conduct preparatory to the burial. It was a belief, not sudden or enthusiastic, but the result of time and reflection; the effect of conviction on the most rational principles. "Have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed on him?" was a question of the discontented Sanhedrim: perhaps, none had, then, openly avowed their belief in Christ.

But there were none, perhaps, (except Joseph and Nicodemus) who made the slightest effort to become acquainted with Jesus and his doctrines; who, discarding from their minds every prejudice against his person, approached him with a view to information, and with a sincere desire of ascertaining the truth of his pretensions. "The rich and honourable counsellor of Arimathea," after having once condescended to visit the mean abode of our Saviour, was induced to court his conversation, and to enlist himself, though secretly, among the number of his disciples. "The ruler of the Jews," after having once conversed with Jesus in private, was not afraid, amidst the violent invectives of the pharisees, to interpose a question in our Saviour's behalf, though he spoke with apparent diffidence and reserve. This very diffidence and reserve, indeed, must suggest to us, that his attachment to Christ was not the consequence of hasty prepossessions. Had he been devoted to our Lord, from a

blind credulity or a superstitious confidence, he would, probably, have discovered resentment at the invincible obstinacy of his brethren, in some sarcastic remark, or passionate apostrophe.

That Joseph and Nicodemus could have conceived a friendship for our Saviour on any other ground than a belief in his divine mission, can never be supposed, consistently with their rank and station in the country, and, more especially, their high character. If they believed not, that "God was with him," they must have deemed him a hypocrite: and if they deemed him a hypocrite, they must have cultivated an acquaintance with a person, whom they saw continually engaged in attempting to deceive themselves and the whole Jewish nation; and that too, in points of vast importance, both political and religious.

We have, then, every reason to think, that, after a cool and candid and deliberate attention to our Blessed Lord, they actually became proselytes to the religion which he taught. And, though they did not make an open profession of their belief before his death; yet we observe them uncommonly active in his burial, to the hazard of wealth and power and reputation, and even to the risque of life itself.

It was usual among the Romans, to expose the bodies* of the crucified, to the beasts of the field

* "At gente in Scythica suffixa cadavera truncis
Lenta dies sepelit, putri liquentia tabo." Silius Ital. l. 13.

and

and fowls of the air, and all the injuries of the weather; and to set a guard * on them, lest some pitying hand should interpose and bestow on them the rites of burial. In conformity to this custom, the body of our Saviour was fixed to the cross, and a guard was set—the Centurion and his soldiers watching Jesus. To the completion of the whole barbarous process, the Jews were, doubtless, looking with avidity. They who had, inhumanly, cried out: “Let him be crucified,” were now anticipating the moment, when they should see our Saviour torn by the talons of the vulture, or his body blackening in the air—limb dropping off after limb, in horrid putrefaction! Bold then, indeed, must have been the enterprize of Joseph and Nicodemus; forced as they were to confront a multitude now on the very point of satiating their cruel appetites, yet determined upon the rescue of their Lord, even though they sacrificed their lives to the popular fury! Such a measure could have originated only in the conviction, that Jesus was, indeed, “the Christ!”

And, with this observation I should conclude,

* Thus Petronius, in the story of the Ephesian matron, introduces the soldier who stood centinel on the dead bodies on their respective crosses, “ne quid ad sepulturam corpora detraheret.” And afterwards it appears, that “Cruciarum unius parentes, ut viderunt laxatam custodiam, detraxere nocte pendentem, suum premoque mandaverunt officio.” Pp. 257, 259.

leaving my readers to their own reflexions; were I not aware, that there are some circumstances in the business, which have appeared of a suspicious nature to the sceptical mind.

It has been suggested, that both the counsellor and the ruler of the Jews might, in their secret correspondence with Jesus, have concerted a scheme for a supposititious burial. Foreseeing his condemnation to the cross, they might easily have rendered the sepulchral cavern, near as it was to the place of his crucifixion, a commodious receptacle for his living body. But, was it possible to presume, that Christ could escape death upon the cross? Was it easy to imagine, that the body of Jesus would be delivered up to his friends, without the enquiry, whether it were really dead? If Joseph and Nicodemus entertained such a thought, the event proves, that they were mistaken. Casuists, in the extravagance of scepticism, may still conceive, that, bribed by the riches, and overawed by the power of the Jewish counsellor and ruler, the Centurion and his soldiers were in the plot. But the Centurion, a pagan as we have seen, if not altogether, was almost persuaded to be a Christian, by the miraculous death of Christ upon the cross. And one of the soldiers, after our Saviour had expired, actually pierced his side with a spear.

The more minutely, in short, we enquire into circumstances, the more firmly will be established our belief in this, as in every other part of the Gospel

pel-History. And (what must at once discredit the suggestions of the infidel) the simple and honest air of the narration before us shews, that there was no imposture in the case.

It was impossible that Joseph or Nicodemus could have imposed a false burial or a false death upon the world, without the knowledge of our Lord's disciples. Had his followers perceived any suspicious circumstance in the intercourse of Christ with Joseph or Nicodemus, they would have endeavoured to satisfy their minds on the subject, and must, very soon, have detected the plans of the Jewish counsellor and ruler. And, if not, St. John and others, who were witnesses of our Saviour's crucifixion, must have known, whether his death were real or fictitious. The mode, however, in which St. John himself and the other Evangelists relate all the circumstances attending his death, discovers plainly their assurance, that there *could be no imposture*. Had they been privy to the supposed deceptious scheme, they must have told a fabricated tale. And, in inventing such a tale, they would scarcely have left it open to the caviller, in those very points where the consciousness of the fallacy must naturally have set them on their guard. They would have omitted to mention any *secret* interviews between Joseph or Nicodemus and our Lord: they would not have stated the apparent precipitation of Joseph in requesting the body of Christ; before, in Pilate's apprehension, he could possibly

possibly have expired. They would have passed, in silence, the newness of the sepulchre, as if purposely hewn out for Christ; nor have noticed its convenient vicinity to the scene of the crucifixion.

CAIPHAS.

CAIPHAS.

THAT Jesus preached the resurrection of the body, during his life-time, and that he foretold, in the face of all the Jews, the exact time, in which he himself should rise from the dead, are facts the most prominent in the Gospel-history. The Jews held our Saviour's prediction with respect to himself in perfect contempt, and deemed the completion of it impossible. And they were now presented, as they conceived, with an opportunity of proving it false, and exulted in the idea of demolishing the new fabric of Christianity, by subverting its very corner stone. "The chief priests, therefore, and pharisees came together to Pilate, after the crucifixion, saying: Sir, we remember, that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people: He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the

“the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch—Go your way—make it as sure as you can. So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.”* Here every precaution was taken to convince the disciples of their error. A great stone was rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre: It was sealed; so that the tomb could not possibly be opened without detection; and, what seemed a certain security, centinels were set to guard it.

But all these precautions, instead of answering the purposes intended, operated to the confirmation of Christianity—to the confusion of its enemies. There is no doubt but the Jews, who had taken all this care to prevent what they deemed delusion from spreading among the people, were not willing to rest here; but, still anxious to effect their purpose, had it in contemplation to exhibit to the people, and to his disciples, the corpse of our Saviour, immediately after the appointed time (which was only three days) was expired. This was an obvious mode of proceeding. And could they have thus produced his lifeless body, they would, at once, have detected the imposture, and have for ever silenced the professors of Christianity. But this they were not able to do. For at the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, there was a great earthquake—the angel of the Lord, whose countenance was like lightning,

* St. Matthew, xxvii. 62.

and

and his raiment white as snow, rolled back the stone from the sepulchre; the centinel shook for fear, and Jesus arose from the dead! The conduct of the chief priests, on this emergence, will furnish us with strong evidence in proof of the resurrection of Jesus. "Behold, (says St. Matthew) "some of the watch came into the city, and shewed "unto the chief priests all the things that were "done. And when they were assembled with the "elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large "money unto the soldiers, saying—' Say ye, his "disciples came by night, and stole him away, while "we slept.' And if they come to the governor's "ears, we will persuade him and secure you. So "they took the money, and did as they were "taught."*

It is evident, from this statement, that Caiphas and his brother priests were thrown into great consternation in consequence of the report of the soldiers. Such, indeed, was the confusion of their senses, that, after they had taken counsel with the elders, they determined on a measure in the highest degree absurd and ridiculous. Had they suspected, for an instant, that the testimony of the watchmen was false, they would certainly have contradicted it. But they perceived that it was too true, for their peace of mind and their reputation. Struck by the consciousness of having pursued to death the Saviour who was now risen in triumph from

* St. Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

the grave, yet afraid to expose their weakness and their guilt to the populace, by an acknowledgement of Christ's resurrection, they had recourse to a mean falshood, which carried with it its own confutation: They condescended to bribe the soldiers. And for what purpose did they bribe the soldiers? To report a tale, the inconsistency of which must have appeared without a moment's reflexion.—

“ Say ye—‘ His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.’* Could they say, what was done whilst they slept? Or if they did, who would give credit to their assertions? Yet this report, with all its contradictoriness and folly, is the best that the chief priests could have devised, as a colour of the real fact. They could not have instructed the soldiers to assert, that his disciples carried off the body by force; for that would have been impossible. Nor would it have been easy to persuade the guard to accuse themselves of intoxication. Even in suffering themselves to fall asleep, there was a degree of negligence highly reprehensible in centinels, and punishable by the laws of every

* Ye not only did not repent (says Justin Martyr to the Jews) when ye learned that He was risen from the dead; but ye appointed chosen men, and sent them out into all the world, to say—“ that a certain heresy had been begun by one Jesus a Galilean; whom his disciples stole by night out of the tomb, in which he had been laid when taken down from the cross.”—“ ον σταθευσαντων ημων, οι μαθηται αυτου ελεφαντες αυτω απο του μνηματος νεκρου.” &c. &c. Justin, p. 335.—What a strong confirmation this, of the above, as related by St. Matthew, xxviii. 13.

country.

country. And the soldiers, we find, were, in this case, apprehensive of punishment. For, "if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him" (said the priests) and secure you."

Any farther reflexions on this memorable incident would be superfluous. I shall add only, that the chief-priests, by their various manœuvres, have furnished us with circumstantial evidence of a fact which they laboured to suppress, and that thus, the Roman centinels, the instruments of priestcraft, were, virtually, the first preachers of Christ's resurrection.

MARY

MARY MAGDALENE.

IF doctrines, though perfectly original, yet harmonizing with the sensibilities of men; though pure as the heaven of heavens, yet suited to the frailness of mortality—if such may be conceived to argue a divine revelation; the doctrines of the Gospel carry in themselves the most indisputable evidence of the source whence they sprung.

Among these, *repentance and forgiveness of sins* were new to the world, as the miracles that accompanied their promulgation: yet they, every way, correspond with our feelings, and speak to our sense of imbecility.

In the character of MARY MAGDALENE, the doctrines of *repentance and forgiveness of sins* are illustrated with a force and beauty that claim our admiration.

Mary Magdalene had been a notorious sinner. She was the woman “out of whom went seven devils.”* And she was, afterwards, as distinguished

* St. Luke viii. 2.

a saint.

a saint. Her portrait, at the pharisee's house, has a wonderful air of simplicity.

Whilst "Jesus sat at meat, in a pharisee's house, Mary Magdalene entered the room, and stood behind him weeping, and washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment of spikenard from an alabaster-box. And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."—"Now when the pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake with himself, saying: 'This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is, that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.'* And Judas was moved with indignation, and said: 'To what purpose is this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?'"

How finely contrasted are Mary's tears of penitence, her humble attitude, her affectionate ardours with the suspicious incredulity of the pharisee, and the villainous duplicity of Judas!

"But Jesus said, 'Let her alone: why trouble you her? Against the day of my burying hath she kept this. And her sins, which were many, are forgiven: for she loved much.'"

It appears, that Mary Magdalene was one of those devout women, who accompanied our Saviour on his travels, and "ministered to him, of their sub-

* St. Luke vii. 39.

"stance;" who followed him to the place of his crucifixion, stood by the cross, and witnessed his last agonies. Though our Saviour's disciples had, for the most part, "forsaken him and fled," yet "neither tribulation nor distress, nor persecution, nor peril," could separate her from Jesus.

From the cross, she followed him to the sepulchre, and beheld how his body was laid. And no sooner was the sabbath past, than she went to the sepulchre, "when it was yet dark," says the Evangelist: so strong was her affection for our Lord, that all selfish considerations were dissipated before it. On any other occasion, she would have approached a tomb with fear and trembling. But the woman was now absorbed in the saint. Observing that the stone was taken away from the sepulchre, "she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter and to that other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter, therefore, went forth and that other disciple." "In the mean time Mary stood without, at the sepulchre, weeping: and, as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' She saith unto them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and

"saw

"saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was
 "Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, why
 "weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?' She, sup-
 "posing him to be the gardener, saith unto him,
 "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where,
 "thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.
 "Jesus saith unto her, 'Mary!' She turned and
 "saith unto him, 'Rabboni!' which is to say,
 "Master. Jesus saith unto her, 'Touch me not;
 "for I am not yet ascended to my Father: But go
 "to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto
 "my Father and your Father; and to my God,
 "and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told
 "the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and
 "that he had spoken these things unto her."*

Such are the striking points of view, in which the
 doctrines of repentance and forgiveness of sins, are
 exhibited in the Holy Gospel! But when Jesus
 cried to Mary: "I ascend unto my Father and your
 "Father—to my God and your God!"—this was
 the point in which the forgiveness of sins was fully
 illustrated! That Mary Magdalene, once so infa-
 mous a woman, as to be called, proverbially, *the*
sinner, should be the *very first person* to whom
 Jesus appeared after his resurrection, and to whom
 he announced his approaching ascension—should
 be preferred to all his disciples and apostles and
 destined evangelists and preachers of his word,
 throughout the world, for so momentous an inter-

* St. John, xx. 1—18.

view, so awful a communication—I must consider, as an incident *much more* than historical; as a providential event most audibly proclaiming, that as “CHRIST WAS DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENCES,” SO “HE WAS RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION!”



THE

THE TRAVELLERS OF THE VILLAGE OF EMMAUS.

THE day of the Resurrection was now closing. It was on the evening of this day, that two of our Lord's disciples were travelling towards the village of Emmaus. And, whilst they talked of all that had happened, and "communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near. But their eyes were holden, that they should not know him."* In the rest of the narrative, our Saviour's question (as he joined the two sorrowful travellers) with respect to the cause of their sadness—the answer of Cleopas by another question proving the celebrity of Jesus of Nazareth, and the notoriety of his crucifixion—the notion of a temporal Redeemer now abandoned—the hopes and fears that hovered over the sepulchre of Christ, and the struggles between doubt and belief, are so extremely natural in the representation, that we fancy the groupe immedi-

* St. Luke xxiv. 13—16.

ately before us: and when our Saviour charges the travellers with unbelief, and explains to them the Scriptures, we see them struck by his upbraidings, ~~and listening to his lessons with mysterious feelings!~~

There must have been something in his countenance and manner, something in his voice, to thrill the nerves, and inspire sentiments of terror and joy! They treated him not as a stranger: they acquiesced in his assumed authority: they resented not his reproof. And, when they drew nigh to the village, though their eyes were still holden, that they should not know him, "they constrained him" to go into their house. For it was towards evening, and the day was far spent. "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it, and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, that they knew him: and he vanished out of their sight. And they said, one to another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"

The slowness of the friends of Christ in giving credit to the resurrection, discovers, we have been told, the insufficiency of the proofs attending it. But nothing can be more frivolous than this objection. It appears, that, though some, at the first interview, knew not Jesus, and some were terrified, and others wondered and believed not for joy; yet all, at last, believed. This very circumstance, so far from being objectionable, must tend to establish the fact. It precludes every idea of collusion

(previous

(previous to his death) between Christ and his disciples; shews that, averse from "idle tales," they examined the fact of the Resurrection with impartiality, and indicates that weight of evidence which, at length, carried conviction to their minds.

In the mean time, the narrative before us, is, in the highest degree, satisfactory. Its simplicity charms the taste with all the beauty of language, and satisfies the judgment with all the unsuspiciousness of truth. After a day of darkness, of "thick darkness," how cheering was the sun, as it shone on the two disciples on their way! After an eclipse so terrible, how pleasant were its beams, at evening! With the eye of fancy we perceive the stranger draw near; we walk on with the travellers; and with Him we enter the humble habitation of His guests. But, as we seem "to eat of the bread and drink of the cup which He blessed," we see him still, yet not in fancy! we see him still, though he "vanish from the sight;" we see, with the eye of faith, the Lord of Immortality!

THOMAS.

FROM several passages in the Evangelic history, it appears that the disciples, in general, had no clear ideas of the new doctrines which our Saviour revealed.

This observation is particularly applicable to Thomas and Philip. Even a short time before his crucifixion, these honest followers of our Lord appear to have misconceived his character as related to the Everlasting Father, or to have formed a very unworthy notion of the ends of his mission. In his affectionate conversation with his disciples, previous to his death, "Whither I go, ye know," says Christ; "and the way ye know."* Yet Thomas said unto him: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" And, when our Saviour, pursuing his discourse observed; "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also;" Philip exclaimed: "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." At Philip's

* St. John xiv. 4. 5. 7. 8. 9.—21. 22.

ignorance

ignorance and misconception, Jesus appears to have expressed some degree of surprize: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" This whole conversation of Christ, indeed, was mysterious to his disciples. For, when our Saviour said: "He that loveth me, shall be loved of my father; and I will love him, and manifest myself to him;" Judas answered, ("not Iscariot") "Lord, how is it, that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?"

Of these persons, it should seem that Thomas was the slowest in his discernment. The intelligence which he received from the other disciples, that they "had seen the Lord," appeared to him almost impossible. "Except I shall see in his hands (said one) the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."* After the lapse of eight days, Thomas still remained incredulous. It was then, that "Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him: 'My Lord, and my God.'"

From the whole, it is evident, that the hesitation

* St. John xx, 25, 26, 27, 28.

of Thomas, in acknowledging our Lord, after the Resurrection, was owing rather to a slowness of apprehension, than an evil heart of unbelief. With respect to ourselves, this conduct of Thomas has no other tendency than still further to confirm our faith; as it brings, in a manner, before our eyes, the most striking proofs of the identity of that body which was crucified and buried and raised again from the dead.

THE

THE DISCIPLES, RECOGNIZING OUR SAVIOUR AFTER HIS RESURRECTION.

PERHAPS the slowness of our Saviour's disciples, in recognizing him after his Resurrection, may be, in some degree, attributable, if not to a change in his person, yet to *a mode of appearing* among them, different from his former manner. Though neither his stature nor the fashion of his countenance were materially altered; though I do not conceive that he was transfigured as on the Mount, when he appeared in a glorified form to * Peter, John, and James; yet his manner of appearing to his disciples during the period that intervened between his resurrection and ascension, was, probably, new.

The expressions of the Evangelists, relative to these APPEARANCES, are worthy observation.

“ Αἱ δὲ προσελθόντες ἐκράτησαν αὐτὸν τοὺς πόδας, καὶ προσκύνησαν αὐτῷ. Ἰστί δὲ γὰρ αὐταῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Μὴ φοβεσθε.” — “ Καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν, προσκύνησάν αὐτὸν.” †

* St. Luke xlviii. 9.

† St. Matt. xxviii.

Here

Here the suddenness of each appearance is remarkable; and the sensations of fear are visible in his disciples. They fall down and worship him: and some are in doubt, who he is. In St. Mark:

“Εφανη Μαρτα.”—“Εφανερωθη εν στερε μαρτη”—“απακλιμενοις αυτοις τοις τοις ενδεκα εφανερωθη.” *

Thus, also, St. Luke:

“Και αυτος ο Ιησους εηργασας συνεπορευετο αυτοις. Οι δε οφθαλμος αυτων εκραυεν του μη επιγνωσαι αυτον.”—“Και ποτος αφητος ηγενοτο”—“αυτος ο Ιησους εστη εν μεση αυτων”—“εμφοβοι—ιδουσιν πνευμα θιασμου.” †

And thus, St. John:

“Μη μου αποτρυ ουκ ανεβηκα προς τον πατερα μου.”—“Την Θυραν κλεισμενων, ηλθεν ο Ιησους, και εστη παρ το κρημα”—“Εφωκ ηρωσειν εαυτον επι της θαλασσης της Τιβεριδαδος.”—“εστη ο Ιησους εις τον αγκυραλον.”

It seems, from these various passages, that our Lord was seen by his disciples at intervals only; from the time of his resurrection to his ascension; and that his mode of appearing to them was very unlike his former manner. This period, as we collect from the Acts of the Apostles, was forty days.

2. Why, during these forty days, our Lord should occasionally and in so peculiar a manner, have shewn himself to his disciples, may rather, perhaps, be a question of curiosity, than of real importance. But the predicament in which our Saviour stood, before his death, compared with his situation after his resurrection, will instantly suggest to us, the probable cause of his present conduct.

* St. Mark xvi.

† St. Luke-xxiv.

Our

Our Saviour first came to us, in the form of a servant, and was, in all things, like unto us, except that He was free from sin. During his travels through Judea, he was subjected to every human infirmity. He was susceptible of corporeal pain and mental anguish; and, amidst the persecutions to which he was exposed, he discovered the keenest sense of both. He wept and was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane: he bore his cross to Calvary with pain, and he expired on that cross, in agony. He was thus "humbled," and thus "suffered," for man.

It is natural, therefore, to conceive, that as the representative of man, he should have mixed in human societies, and conversed familiarly with his friends and associates, like other mortal beings. And thus, accordingly, he had conversed.

After his resurrection, however, he assumed a new character. He was no longer the servant, or the victim. He had run his course of slavery: he had suffered and died; was buried and was risen again: the expiation for sin was past: and he now *triumphed* over death and the grave. He had now only to prepare his disciples for his final departure, for his ascension to his heavenly father.

It is equally natural, therefore, to suppose, that, as the God whose seat was in Heaven, He should not abide among men familiarly, as heretofore; and that he should discover no more of human nature than was necessary to prove his identity.

3. Yet

3. Yet these discriminations are not directly marked by either of the Evangelists: they are the subjects of no comment whatever. All the rays of the divinity, that thus emanated from our Saviour, are merely incidental; and are chiefly discoverable in the wonder and perturbation of his disciples.

THE

THE APOSTLES.

“GO ye” (says Christ to his Apostles, immediately before his ascension) **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”*** But how were they qualified to preach the Gospel? and what was the prospect before them, to animate their preaching?

With respect to their qualification, they had, apparently, none but probity. They had sufficient understanding, indeed, to be competent witnesses to a few plain facts and incidents. They could see and wonder at the miracles of Christ. They could observe his sufferings. They could not mistake his person, when he was led to Calvary, to be crucified, or when he expired upon the cross. They could recognize and converse with him after his resurrection. And, they could view him ascending into Heaven; and, **SURE** of his ascension, return **“to Jerusalem with GREAT JOY.”**

* St. Mark xvi. 15.

But

But they possessed no genius, no learning. Their minds were unformed by education. From incapacity and prejudice, they were, in many points, unable to comprehend, and backward in believing, the revelations of Christ. They had no insight into the spiritual character of our Lord; and no conception of that kingdom, of which he repeatedly spoke, as universal. Though commanded to go and teach every people under Heaven, yet the twelve were all Galileans, and were scarcely qualified for the promulgation of the Gospel within their own country. Uninstructed in the original text, and even the Greek version of the prophecies, they had every impediment in their way, whether they attempted to preach to the Jews, or to the Gentiles.*

In the mean time, what had they to expect in recompence for their labours? We have already seen, that they discovered no great degree of fortitude in the character of our Lord's disciples. Though, as having accompanied our Saviour in his travels through Judea, they had heard his doctrines and witnessed his miracles; yet no sooner did he fall into the hands of his enemies, than they forsook him and fled: And one, who appeared to have more courage than the rest, betrayed uncommon weakness, in the hour of danger.

Can we imagine, then, any probability of success, from the mission of such persons, when they

* See Lightfoot, Vol. I. 285.

were

were expressly told by our Saviour, that he sent them forth as "lambs among wolves," that they would "be hated of all men for his name's sake," and that "their enemies should deliver them up to be afflicted, and should put them * to death?" Is it possible to conceive, that St. Peter, who so glaringly failed in his resolution not to forsake his Lord, could have heard without a horror to disqualify him for his office, that prophetic description of the very death he should die—"When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."†

Against the dangers thus predicted, our Saviour, moreover, enjoined his apostles, by no means to prepare themselves—to take no precautions such as human foresight might suggest; but to persevere in an enterprize which must inevitably expose them to the bitterest persecution, and terminate in their destruction.

In recompence for their labours, then, the apostles had only to expect, all that was revolting to human nature, all that was calculated to repel their fortitude, to damp their faith, and detach them from the cause of Christianity.

* St. Luke x. 3. St. Matt. x. 22. 17.

† St. John xiv. 36. xxi. 18.—St. Peter seems, himself, to allude to this prediction, 2 Pet. I. 19, 14. The prophecy was actually accomplished under Nero.

Under these circumstances, what was there, after their Saviour's ascension, to prevent the immediate flight and dispersion of his apostles; their abandonment of all spiritual concerns, and return to their earthly occupations? Nothing, but their confidence in our Saviour's promise of the comforter, who was * "to teach them all things, and guide them unto "all truth." For the performance of this promise, they waited at Jerusalem, "where they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing "God."† And, on the day of Pentecost, the promise was fulfilled.

Hence it was, that, endued with "the word of "wisdom," as "with all utterance," and, "out "of weakness waxing strong," they were enabled to preach to every nation under Heaven, and "to "speak the word of God with boldness." Hence, separated from each other, and emigrating into distant regions as the Holy Spirit directed their steps, and placed beyond the reach of correspondence, they persisted, wherever they were, in preaching the same Gospel, through all its extent and variety of doctrine and of duties;—that Gospel, with which, but just before, they were very imperfectly acquainted; whose distinguishing character they had utterly misconceived; and which, now that they were severally instructed in the knowledge of it, they had no opportunity of developing to each

* St. John xiv. 26.

† St. Luke xxiv. 53.

other.

other. Hence it was, that each solitary individual, plunged at once in the midst of insuperable difficulties; threatened with dangers the most shocking to humanity, and denied that comfort and support which, had they remained in a body, would have sprung from mutual communication, continued to "preach Christ crucified," with a magnanimity and fortitude, that can never be paralleled in the annals of warlike heroism. Hence St. Peter, in particular, once so ignorantly zealous, self-confident, and pusillanimous, ever afterwards displayed the energies of an enlightened mind, desires subdued and passions moderated, humility truly christian, and fortitude far more than human. Directed by Jesus himself, to a view of the cross on which he was to expire, he still pursued his path, unshaken; and drew nearer and nearer to that cross, with increasing faith and courage. And, when the fatal hour was come, he died with serenity the same death which his Lord had done, "even as Jesus Christ had shewed him."*

From a view of all these striking points, from a comparison of our Saviour delivering to his Apostles their grand commission, with their conduct after his ascension, we may *conclude upon principles that even infidelity can never impeach, that Jesus was no impostor!*

If he were an impostor, he must have been sensible, like Mahomet or any other false prophet, that

* 2 St. Peter i.

his pretended gospel could be established only by the force or sagacity of man, and not by any supernatural assistance. He would not, therefore, have chosen those for his apostles, who, from their incapacity and ignorance, were not able to comprehend, much less to explain to the world, his system of religion; who from habitual prejudice had been expecting a very different kingdom from the kingdom of the Messiah, and whose weakness and timidity were ready to shrink from the slightest appearance of danger.

If, however, we suppose, that he had really made choice of persons so incompetent to their office, he would not have been industrious in throwing difficulties in their way, in mustering before their eyes the numerous hardships, and the perils which they were destined to meet, in their new unheard of enterprize: for such were to dissipate their hopes, throw upon their spirits an overwhelming horror, and render the whole project abortive. If we think, that the promise of a comforter from Heaven might counteract the effects of this developement of the dangers attending their mission; we cannot, after a moment's reflexion, conceive, that he would have made such a promise at all; since he must have been sensible of his inability to perform it. Admitting that he actually promised them a comforter, a very short time would have proved the fallaciousness of the promise. His apostles would have waited for the comforter, and waited in vain; and after long and tedious expectation would have broken
up

up their meetings: dejected, irritated, confounded, they would have renounced the new religion which they had been commissioned to teach, without being enabled to understand it; they would have mingled with their fellow-Jews, and have been never heard of more.

We conclude then, upon principles, which even infidelity can never impeach, that Jesus was no impostor, but THAT HE WAS VERILY THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

PILATE.

I Have introduced Pilate to my readers, with a view chiefly to his supposed notices of the resurrection and crucifixion of Christ:

That such state-papers (if *papers* I may call them) actually existed, we should conceive probable, from Pilate's official situation and disposition and conduct. And, with this presumption in favour of their existence, we should be satisfied of the fact, from very slight historical evidence.

From his situation as procurator of Judea, we may suppose that Pilate would not have omitted to send intelligence of the crucifixion of Christ to his master Tiberius. In the eyes of the Jews, indeed, it was an event of considerable importance to the Roman Emperor. "If thou let this man go (said the Jews) thou art not Cæsar's friend: Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar."* This political opposition of Jesus Christ to Cæsar

* St. John xix. 12.

must

must have struck Pilate as no matter of indifference: It at once determined him, in his resolution to deliver up our Lord to crucifixion, and probably induced him to state to the Emperor every circumstance that attended our Saviour's passion and death.

From the disposition and general conduct, also, of Pilate, we may infer, that he would naturally have collected all the particulars relating to our Lord with accuracy, and have transmitted them to Tiberius with fidelity.

Pilate was not devoid of humanity, or a sense of justice. Whilst he followed the suggestions of his own mind, he exhibited towards our Saviour no small degree of candour and mercy. He saw and felt, that every charge against Christ was false or frivolous. Observing our Saviour meek and unoffending, yet cruelly insulted by the multitude; he exclaimed: "Behold the man!"* Mark his gentleness—pity his sufferings—believe him innocent, and release him from unmerited persecution! He firmly and repeatedly declared, that he "found no fault" in Jesus—"no, nor yet Herod," said he: and he "washed his hands before the multitude saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just person."† How far he might have been affected by the distress of his wife, § who had suffered many things in a dream because of Christ, on the

* St. John. xix. 5. † St. Luke xxiii. 14, 15.

‡ St. Matthew, xxvii. 24. § St. Matt. xxvii. 19.

very day of our Saviour's trial, it is impossible for us to determine. His own feelings were sufficiently distressing. Yet, with all these impressions in favour of Christ, no sooner did he hear the insinuation, that he was not Cæsar's friend, than, intimidated by the menaces of the multitude, he acted against his own conviction, and delivered up Jesus to be crucified.

Thus, more than commonly interested in the fate of our Saviour, he was surely not unconcerned in all that afterwards befell the same, "just Person." And, when conscious of having "shed the innocent blood," and more and more, as his conscience reproached him, imprest with the idea of Christ's "immaculate character, he was informed that "that Jesus whom he had crucified," was arisen from the dead; he must, one should imagine, have been struck (for the moment at least) by the image of our Lord's divinity, and have become almost a Christian.

What, then, could be more natural, than, with these sentiments and feelings, to report the whole transaction to Tiberius, and to state every particular of Christ's resurrection as well as crucifixion?

Of the crucifixion, Pilate would, from his official character, have sent notices to government, assigning his reasons for the execution of the criminal; but, from his various feelings, his prepossession in favour of Christ, his remorse of conscience, and his eagerness, probably, to make some reparation for so cruel a murder, he would not have stopped here.

here, Pilate would have represented Christ as the sad victim of state necessity; have described the extraordinary purity of his life and conversation, have recurred to his miracles, and, closing the narration with an account of his resurrection, have spoken of each signal incident, with grief and terror.

: In all the anguish of self-accusation, Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests, and confessed that he had betrayed the innocent blood. But, by this acknowledgment of his guilt, he had not satisfied his mind. "He went and hanged himself."

Whether Pilate were thus open, in the confession of his iniquity, we are not *sure*: but he, too, was the author of his own death. It is, indeed, uncommonly striking, that the betrayer and condemning judge of our Lord should have perished, both, by suicide. +

II. If we have recourse to history, we shall be enabled, perhaps, to justify our suppositions by no unsatisfactory proof. On a comparison of a passage in Tertullian with one in Justin Martyr, it should appear, that Pilate not only communicated the death and resurrection of Christ, by an express to Tiberius, but that he recorded both among the acts of his government.

With respect to the express, Tertullian informs us; "*Ea omnia super Christo Pilatus et ipse jam pro sua conscientia Christianus, Cæsari tum Tiberio renunciavit.*" Apol. c. 21. And such was the effect of this intelligence on the mind of Tiberius,

berius, that the same historian says: "Tiberius, ergo, cujus tempore nomen Christianum in seculum introivit, annunciatum sibi ex Syria Palastina, quæ veritatem illius (Christi) Divinitatis revelarat, detulit ad Senatum cum prerogativa suffragii sui. c. 5." * Eusebius relates this circumstance, in his ecclesiastical history, (l. 2. c. 2.) on the authority of Tertullian, and refers it to the 22d year of Tiberius. "Pilato de Christianorum dogmate ad Tiberium referente, Tiberius retulit ad Senatum, ut inter cætera sacra reciperetur." That Tertullian was well versed in the Roman history, and a writer of great reputation, I need not remark: and he lived in the age succeeding Christ. It is inconceivable, therefore, that he could have asserted such facts as the above, in the face of the Roman people, and the whole world, unless they had been substantiated, beyond the possibility of refutation.

These were the very facts, which induced him to embrace Christianity. Though Pilate's express (published, perhaps, in the "Acta diurna," or the newspapers of Rome) were lost among the news of the day, and were never accessible to Tertullian; yet the circumstances of the Emperor's referring the question to the senate, "whether Jesus Christ of Judea should be admitted into the number of

* *Fuere genuina acta Pilati* (says the commentator on Eusebius) *ad quæ provocabant primi Christiani, tabulam ad certissimam fidei monumenta.*

"the

"the Roman Divinities," is so singular and so momentous, that no historian of credit would have ventured to report it, unless he had been fully assured of its authority. If true, its publicity would have supported the historian in relating it. If false, all Rome must have known it to be false: and all Rome would have resented so gross a fabrication—such a libel upon their gods.

With regard to the provincial record, there can be no doubt but Pilate kept a journal of the Jewish affairs, in conformity to the custom of the governors of provinces, who preserved on public tables the acts of their government. Among the acts of Pilate, was a memoir of our Blessed Saviour. This memoir, according to Tertullian and Justin Martyr, was universally known. To this, the primitive Christians appealed in their disputes with the Gentiles, as to a document of general notoriety, and undoubted authority. It was this, that Justin Martyr urged, himself, as an evidence that Christ wrought miracles, and particularly that he raised the dead, in his Apology to the Roman Emperors:

"Και ταυτα οτι γιγνσι, δυνασθι μαθιν εκ των επι Πολις Πιλατε γινω-
 "μενων ακτων.—Οτι δι ταυτα επουησιν, εκ των επι Πολις Πιλατε γινω-
 "μενων ακτων μαθιν δυνασθι." Apol. 2.

If the acts of Pilate were not genuine, the most enlightened Christians appealed to a supposititious record, and dared their enemies to contradict what their enemies would have instantly contradicted; and not only contradicted, but proved to be notoriously false, with every expression of triumphant exultation.

exultation. Yes! if the appeal were unfounded, the Roman emperors would not have passed in silence such an insult as a reference to a state-paper, which never existed, or was misrepresented, or mistaken. Surely Julian would have exposed such an appeal, to ridicule, if he had not seriously punished, the appellant. But the appeal was permitted, on all hands, to take its natural course—to confirm the faith of Christians, to dissipate the doubts of half-believers, and to silence the clamours of the prejudiced and obstinate Pagan.

III. The acts of Pilate, then, were genuine. And to the external evidences of Christianity, Pilate has contributed his share, by affording us no equivocal testimony of our Lord's miracles and death and resurrection. It was to these acts, probably, that Tacitus had an eye, when he told, that "Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate."* It seems, at first,

* I shall quote, from this historian, the whole passage that relates to the Christians. It is well known, that Nero was suspected of having set fire to Rome. The historian, commenting on this circumstance, thus proceeds: "*Sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis, aut Deum placamentis, decedebat infamia, quin jussu inceptum crederetur. Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos, et quaesitissimis pœnis affecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auftor nominis ejus Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicis affectus erat. Repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo*" per

first, a matter of surprize, that so enlightened a mind, as that of Tacitus, was able to rest satisfied with the mere historical record of the death of Christ. The event must, in his apprehension, have been singular and striking: and the conduct of the first Christians must have been equally extraordinary. Yet he looked with too much contempt on these humble men, to permit him to enquire into their real circumstances or doctrines. And, we should remember, that pagan philosophy was as adverse to the name of Christ, as Jewish ignorance. "The Jews required a sign, and the Greeks sought "after wisdom."

"per Judæam originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo
 "cuncta undique atrocitas aut pudenda confluunt, celebranturque.
 "Igitur, primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum,
 "multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam
 "odio humani generis conjuncti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita
 "ludibria, ut ferarum tergis conteñi, laniatu canum interirent,
 "aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies,
 "in usum nocturni luminis, urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectacula
 "Nero obtulerat, et Circense ludicrum edebat, habitu
 "aurigæ permixtus plebi, vel circulo insis-ens. Unde quam-
 "quam adversus fontes et novissima exempla meritis, miseratio
 "oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publica sed in sævitiam
 "unius absumerentur." *Annal. lib. xv. b. 44.* That the Christians deserved a very different character appears from Pliny's famous Epistle to Trajan. *lib. x. ep. 97.*

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CONCLUSION.

WHILST I venture to cherish the hope, that these Strictures may inspire with some reverence for sacred writ the young and unreflecting, who presume, in the confidence of their hearts, to treat the characters in the Gospel, as merely historical; I still dread the influence of riches, rank and pleasure, in smothering their ingenuousness, in damping their religious ardour.

I am fearful that he, who, like Zaccheus, has accumulated wealth by speculation, will scarcely imitate the publican in distributing half his money to the poor, for the love of Jesus. I am afraid, that if he momentarily give ear to the doctrines of Christ, like the young man, he will go away, perhaps, sorrowful—yet never return to Jesus, with the Counsellor of Arimathea, anxious to become his disciple, and struggling to disengage himself from the world: or, if he go to his Lord, in private, with Joseph and Nicodemus, I suspect he will hardly keep pace in his religious progress with the counsellor or the ruler, and at length “confess “Christ before men!”

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The Christian monitor, however, must not abandon his hopes of success, from the gloominess of the prospect. His instruction may produce, in his hearers, effects of which themselves may be insensible. Its operation on their minds, though silent, may be salutary. Though "the pride of life," may visibly predominate, yet faith may steal, unperceived, into the heart. The rose of pleasure, however its blush allure the eye, soon passes away. Yet the stream, that glided at its root, still runs; and nourishes the tree, that is to live for ages.





